

Fresno Bee

## **GEORGE MILLER: Time for fresh thinking on fresh water**

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By George Miller

When it comes to California water wars, a lot has changed.

Regrettably, you wouldn't know it from Bill McEwen's column, "It's easy to blame Valley farmers for Delta's woes" Feb. 20, which ignored significant progress in untangling the historically polarized battle over ensuring a stable supply of water for all of California's stakeholders and strengthening our economy.

Erroneously attacking my water credentials might feel good, but it does not solve problems. Fortunately, people across the state now understand that we can no longer unilaterally change water allocations for one group or another without the basis of sound science. But that is what Sen. Dianne Feinstein proposes to do and what Mr. McEwen endorsed in his column.

Sen. Feinstein's plan to accelerate water withdrawals out of the Sacramento River and San Francisco Bay-Delta ecosystem is a serious mistake -- politically and environmentally.

Her plan would wipe out the remaining Sacramento salmon runs, eliminating Pacific Coast fishing industry jobs already under assault from the drought. It would harm northern California water supplies and water rights. And it would undercut significant statewide collaborative water efforts, paralyzing California water policy.

With a fuller picture of recent progress on California water policy, it's easy to understand how devastating and misguided the Feinstein proposal is.

The Bush administration's involvement in California's water conflicts was minimal at best and malicious at worst, with a substantial disregard of scientific evidence. Without a healthier Bay-Delta system, neither the fisheries, the cities, nor the farmers will ever see their situation improve.

That's why the Governor's Delta Vision Task Force argued that state policy must restore the Delta ecosystem and create a more reliable water supply for California.

That's why state lawmakers wrote a package of water bills, and that's why water agencies, environmental groups, and others have worked together on a comprehensive Bay-Delta Conservation Plan.

That's also why I convened a series of meetings last summer with my colleagues, including Sen. Feinstein, Rep. Jim Costa and Rep. Dennis Cardoza, so that we could work together to accomplish our shared goals of an improved Bay-Delta estuary and an improved California economy.

We agreed to temporarily amend the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, the law I authored, to change how water transfers are managed in the state.

I worked with Congress and my Valley colleagues to provide additional funding for infrastructure projects that will add flexibility to water delivery systems, including the Delta-Mendota Canal/California Aqueduct Intertie.

I fought to include \$100 million in the Jobs for Main Street Act to fund the Obama Administration's action plan for California water needs.

And for several years now, I have championed congressional water recycling bills for Republicans and Democrats benefitting Southern and Central California and the Southwest that would yield water for hundreds of thousands of households.

But in a sign of how some people have failed to modernize their thinking about California water, when it came time to vote on my own bill to yield water for another 24,000 California households in the Bay Area at no detriment to any other water user in the state, every single congressman from the Valley opposed it.

California's state and federal water policies are interconnected. It is in the best interest of all farmers and all stakeholders to work collaboratively to improve the health of the Bay-Delta and add flexibility to our water systems. But make no mistake: All of these efforts will be derailed by Sen. Feinstein's plan.

I hope Mr. McEwen will now understand just how much the rest of the state has changed its thinking on water, and how important fresh thinking on this precious resource is for our state's future success.

**Rep. George Miller (D-Martinez) is the former chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee.**